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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CAIRO 000016

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: AYMAN NOUR UPDATE AND LETTER TO POTUS

REF: CAIRO 3527

Classified By: DCM Stuart Jones, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a December 30 meeting, Gameela Ismail, wife of imprisoned Ghad Party leader and former presidential candidate Ayman Nour, told us that Nour's health is currently "ok" and that he hopes to be released in one of the traditional holiday amnesties granted by President Hosni Mubarak in April and July. Ismail passed us a letter from Nour to President Bush, in which Nour urges POTUS to "not overlook reform and democracy issues" during his upcoming visit to Egypt, noting (in an apparent reference to President Bush's comments about Nour in his June 5, 2007 speech in Prague) that "we do not expect less in Egypt" than what was said in Prague. (Full text of translated letter at para 5). Ismail also discussed a potential court case against her, and the ongoing Ghad party leadership dispute. End summary.

¶2. (C) Ismail highlighted that, as of early April 2008, Nour will have served half of his 5-year prison sentence, thereby making him eligible for a holiday amnesty granted by President Mubarak (Note: There are three types of amnesty in Egypt - (1) an amnesty granted by the president under constitutional article 149, which is reportedly rarely used, (2) a holiday amnesty granted by the president, which in order to be eligible for a prisoner must have served at least half of his jail term, and (3) a health-based release granted by either the Public Prosecutor or the director of the Prisons Authority. End note.) She commented that Nour "hopes" that the U.S. will push the GOE to release him in the late April Sinai Liberation Day amnesty, or the July 26 holiday pardon. Ismail said that Nour's health is currently "ok" and that he is in "good spirits," feeling invigorated by a new daily column that he is writing for the independent daily newspaper Al Dustour. Ismail, who is allowed to visit Nour once every two weeks, picks up 15 articles from him on each visit, and passes them onto Al Dustour.

¶3. (C) Ismail said that on December 26 and 27 she was called in for questioning by General Attorney for Central Cairo Mohamed Hilmy Qandeel, relating to potential charges that may be filed against her for "contempt of religion, insulting the president, and interference in a court case." The possible charges stem from a lawsuit filed by a private lawyer about the December 3, 2006 issue of the Ghad party's newspaper. For instance, according to Ismail, the newspaper carried an article about a lawsuit an Egyptian had filed against Gamal Mubarak, hence the charge of "interference in a court case." Ismail did not author the articles in question, and her name is not on the masthead of the newspaper. She therefore feels the possible charges against her are "ludicrous," and "purely harassment." She was told that the decision of whether to formally press charges against her will be made in the next week. DCM immediately requested a meeting with Qandeel, but was advised that the general attorney would not be available.

Post will convey concerns through the office of the Public Prosecutor.

¶4. (C) Ismail said that, despite the December 9 court decision that the rightful president of the Ghad party is the government-backed Moussa Mustafa Moussa (reftel), two other "minor" court cases remain regarding the party's leadership. The cases are due to be decided in January, and Ismail expects the rulings to be in Moussa's favor. "At that point," she said, "with no other ongoing court cases, Moussa will legally be able to take over the Ghad party's downtown headquarters, all finances, and the newspaper." She and other Ghad party leaders are currently discussing attempting to hold a general assembly of the party to elect a new president, as a means of taking back the party leadership from Moussa. Another option under consideration is the formation of a wholly new party, the "Hizb Al Badeel Al Hurr" (the Free Alternative Party).

¶5. (SBU) Ismail passed to us a letter from Ayman Nour to President Bush. Begin text of Embassy translation of Ayman Nour letter:

Your Excellency, President George Bush, with my respect, goodwill and appreciation, please accept my sincere wishes for happy holidays and my appreciation for your efforts pertaining to the spread of freedom, justice and development.

Honorable President, I am writing these lines from my dark prison cell, celebrating the new year on my own, for the third time, and hoping that this coming year will be better than the previous two, that it will be more just, and will fulfill even a minimum of the true reforms that we have dreamt about since the beginning of this century.

CAIRO 00000016 002 OF 003

Regrettably, those dreams have metamorphosed into a long nightmare, and become revolving doors that returned us to our starting point.

Honorable President, I and other Egyptian reformers imprisoned in their cells, or by their fears and frustrations, look with hope towards your upcoming visit to Egypt. We are certain, despite what we hear from Egyptian newspapers, that your visit will not turn its face and will not overlook reform and democracy issues in Egypt. What the world heard in 2007 in Prague with pride and appreciation for the courage and clarity it encompassed -- we do not expect less than that in Egypt in 2008.

Honorable President, we are sure that announcing such courageous positions may sometimes clash with regional security interests. We completely understand that after announcing such courageous positions we all bear psychological burdens, harsh procedures and official media distortion through the harsh campaigns targeting us, our families, our parties and our supporters who face severe risks due to this immovable system. We fully believe that the other alternative - which is silence - will not lead to any progress in the reform process for which we are paying such a high price. Silence only increases feelings of frustration, loneliness and unfairness in the hearts of all Egyptian reformers and liberals. We have been subjected to an assassination of our rights - an intentional assassination committed by the alleged moderate and rational regime that paradoxically serves extremism. The regime has continuously exaggerated the extent and risks of this extremism for a quarter of a century, in order to frighten the world away from freedom and democracy. Whereas the truth is that the growth of extremism is the logical result of the lack of democracy, and the restriction of liberties in order to serve existing authoritarian regimes or to create more authoritarian alternatives. Really, this is an unjust and mistaken equation.

Honorable president, with all my appreciation for your busy

duties, interests and set priorities, I do hope that 2008 will be the year of the victory of values over interests, a year for regaining our trust in values that we believed in and paid the price for doing so, in addition to being the year in which we regain our freedom, rights and dignity.

If authoritarian rulers bet that 2008 will be the year of elections and change, they will redouble their efforts to dither and delay without actually fulfilling any democratic outcomes, maneuvering and skirting their actual implementation. Nonetheless, we view 2008 as the last chance to achieve the values and noble goals of peoples, hopes since 2002. Those hopes faced incidents, events and maneuvers by authoritarian systems that put up an array of roadblocks, and corrupted all true mechanisms for reform, and peaceful change while simultaneously recognizing that it is widely opening the doors to forces of darkness and terrorism. At the same time it is pretending to combat extremism, the regime through its authoritarian rule is providing the reason for its existence and success.

Honorable President, I am personally grateful and proud of the words your Excellency delivered from Prague which cast light on my prison and ended some of my feelings of injustice. I wish, God willing, that we might have the chance to meet soon in 2008, and for as long as I am alive I will remember and be thankful for your words in Prague. I also remember and am thankful for the words of Dr. Condoleezza Rice in my first and last meeting with her in Cairo in 2005.

Honorable President, I know that according to Egyptian law, I could be pardoned after completing half of my prison term (which I will have done as of April 2008), but I expect that the Egyptian regime will insist on exempting me from any of the presidential pardons which are normally issued in the second half of April (on the occasion of Sinai Liberation Day).

But, Honorable President, the important thing is that I eventually be released alive. What I am referring to here are my continuing problems in getting access to medication and food, and the possibility of a reoccurrence of the violent attack that I was subjected to on May 12, 2007. And this is just one side of life. More importantly, Honorable President, when I am eventually released I hope to regain my civil and political rights since without them I will be denied my right to work and earn money as a lawyer or even as a journalist for the subsequent six years. This is tantamount to a new prosecution, in addition to denying me

CAIRO 00000016 003 OF 003

the right to practice my parliamentary and political party's work.

Honorable President, I submit to you that the goal of my imprisonment is to keep me away for the longest possible duration from the Egyptian political sphere, and to kill my liberal party. But the fraudulent and violent process during my years in imprisonment actually succeeded in increasing local and international sympathy with me, which led to the failure of the government's plan and goals for my imprisonment. That is why it was not a surprise that on July 31, 2007 three fraudulent verdicts were passed on the same day - the first is confiscating the Ghad Party and turning it over (along with its finances and newspapers) to a number of government supporters in an unprecedented scandal, which was a fraudulent verdict that was issued secretly without facing us in court; simultaneously another verdict was issued rejecting my medical release; and at the same time, a third verdict was passed banning me from writing from my prison cell.

That is why I am calling all free men in the world to stand with us as we try to retrieve the real liberal opposition party of Al Ghad, and regain my freedom and rights. I also

hope that I might be nominated for some renowned awards, ideally with the support and blessing of your Excellency, such as Nobel Prize or the Congressional Gold Medal, as such awards would help in keeping the issue of my imprisonment alive, and in addition would provide support to the party's members, after the party's finances have been confiscated, and I was banned from even using my personal money for funding the party or my children.

Honorable President, I apologize for the lengthy and detailed presentation. But I do hope that your upcoming visit to Egypt will further your goals for reform, democracy and freedom, and open the doors that were closed during 2007, and return self-confidence to all reformers in Egypt and the Arab world.

Please accept my utmost respect and appreciation.

Dr. Ayman Nour
Mazaraet Tora Public Prison, South Cairo
December 31, 2007

End text of letter.
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